

concerning the distribution, habits, and nesting (written in an easy and agreeable style) follow.

Fourteen excellent coloured plates, executed by Mr. Grönvold, illustrate the rarer and less-known species in the present work, besides which there are pictures of some of the antique monuments and a view of the author's encampment, when on the march through the wilds of Tunisia. Two well-drawn maps, such as should always accompany a zoo-geographical work, are likewise given. The paper and printing of the two volumes leave nothing to be desired, and, in fact, we may say, without fear of contradiction, that the 'Birds of Tunisia' is a work quite "up to date," and does the greatest credit to the author and to every one concerned in it.

XXIV.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

WE have received the following letters addressed to "The Editors":—

SIRS,—Looking through the volume of 'The Ibis' for 1898, I recently came across (p. 62) Graf von Berlepsch's article on the remarkable Fringilline bird *Idiopsar brachyurus*, which had then been recently rediscovered by Garlepp. At the time that the article was originally published I was engaged in cataloguing the collection of Birds in the Free Public Museum, Liverpool, and immediately took the opportunity of going over the large Bolivian and Chilian collections made for Lord Derby in the years 1841/46, by the well-known collector Thomas Bridges, which had never been systematically examined. Among them I was so fortunate as to find an unmistakable specimen of the species in question, which, from the date of acquisition, had undoubtedly been obtained by Bridges at some time prior to 1846, in the neighbourhood of La Paz, Bolivia, though the species was not made known to science by Cassin until 1866. The specimen was duly shown to Dr. H. O. Forbes, the

Director of the Museum, but no record of it was published, and I now bring it before the notice of readers of 'The Ibis' in the hope that some student of Neotropical Ornithology may be induced to explore the bird-collection of the Liverpool Museum, which contains many most interesting forms, especially among the more obscure families, such as the Tyrannidæ, Formicariidæ, and Dendrocolaptidæ.

Yours &c.,

HERBERT C. ROBINSON

(Curator, Selangor State Museum).

Selangor State Museum,
Kuala Lumpur,
Federated Malay States.
December 5th, 1905.

SIRS,—In the current number of 'The Auk' (pp. 26-43) Mr. Jonathan Dwight, Junr., calls attention to the small group of Gulls which occupy an intermediate position between the pure white-winged forms, *L. glaucus* and *L. leucopterus*, and those with black patterns on the primaries. In these species—namely, *L. glaucescens*, *L. nelsoni*, and *L. kumlieni*—the pattern on the primaries is of a pale slate-colour, which never disappears.

Now Mr. Dwight informs us that, though *L. leucopterus* in adult plumage is almost unknown upon the Atlantic coast of N. America, the adult of *L. kumlieni* has been repeatedly captured there, as have been more rarely the young; so that the occurrence of the latter species in Britain might be expected. It may be of interest, therefore, to recall the fact that I read a paper on *L. kumlieni* before the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh on Jan. 21st, 1885, and exhibited the first specimen recognised in this country, which had been brought by a whaler from Cumberland Inlet to Dundee and had been purchased by me from Mr. P. Henderson of that town. I placed the bird in the collection of Mr. Howard Saunders, who verified my identification, and referred to the specimen in the 'Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum,' vol. xxv. p. 289, and in that Museum the collection is now incorporated.

Several years after I had identified this example I obtained another from the same source, also brought to Dundee by an Arctic whaler. This I did not record at the time, but forwarded to the Museum at Edinburgh, where I thought that it would be appreciated. Unfortunately, it has been stored away, possibly as merely an Iceland Gull, and I have not had an opportunity of examining it again. At the time I felt pretty certain of my identification, which I still believe to have been correct, as it was based on the same grounds as in the case of the former specimen, accepted by our highest authority on the *Laridae*, and among other indications on the *very pale* but perfectly visible slate-coloured pattern on the primaries—best seen when these were held up against the light. It would be interesting to learn if further specimens of this Gull have been received in Britain of late years.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

J. A. HARVIE-BROWN.

Dunipace House,
Larbert.
February 1906.

SIRS,—Count Salvadori, our great authority on the *Chenomorphæ*, has, I am pleased to say, done me the honour of publishing, in 'The Ibis' for 1905 (p. 528), some highly valuable remarks on my book. I sincerely appreciate the eminent ornithologist's opinions, and if I think it necessary to give a few explanations respecting some of his remarks, it is solely in the hope that these may prove of general interest and that they may be useful to future students of this group of Birds.

Before, however, speaking of the scientific questions touched upon by Count Salvadori, I wish to point out that the lack of conciseness in parts of my work, justly noticed by the writer, is partly due to the translation, which, faithful enough as a whole, has been prepared by a non-ornithologist. In this no doubt lies the chief cause of some expressions not rendering clearly enough what I wished to say. It is true that I revised the English translation before sending it to press, and compared it with my Russian text as well as I could, but

this proved too difficult a task for one not sufficiently master of the English language. Still the want of clearness in some parts of my book is solely due to myself, and I can now only say *mea culpa!*

I have given in my work all that I knew about the two alleged Grey-lags—the Western and Eastern—to prove that there is not a single constant character by which they can be separated. It may be that I have seen fewer Oriental Grey-lags than has the Count in the Collection of the British Museum, but I have doubtless examined more West-European, Russian, Caucasian, Central-Asiatic, and Siberian specimens of this bird than had the author when writing vol. xxvii. of the Brit. Mus. Cat. of Birds. It appears from this volume that Count Salvadori had for comparison few Western birds of this species, and only birds from Great Britain and two from Norway (one a chick), whilst his acquaintance with the Oriental specimens was mainly based on the study of Indian birds. I am therefore confident that if he had had before him the specimens examined by myself, with the addition of some examples from the Tian-Shan, where I personally observed and collected Grey-lags, he would have found it a great puzzle to draw a line between the European type and the alleged Oriental form *rubrirostris*.

Now that we positively know that the *red bill* of "*rubrirostris*" has been ascribed to the bird owing to an erroneous translation of Radde's German description; further, that the average size and weight of the Indian specimens do not surpass in any way the size and weight of the Western birds, and that in no single case has an Eastern Grey-lag so far been found to weigh as much as 13–16 pounds, as some birds have been known to do in Germany (*Naumann*); and, lastly, that some of the Western birds are just as heavily spotted on the under side as are some Indian examples (according to Hume), I really cannot see what other characters are at hand for keeping apart *Anser anser* and *A. rubrirostris*. If Count Salvadori would only point out a single sufficient character for so doing, I should be the first to acknowledge the Eastern form.

Count Salvadori does not consider the characters of *Melanonyx* But. of generic value, whereas I do.

This is too difficult a question for me to discuss at length here, and I shall only say a few words to explain the reason why I consider the genus well grounded. The absence in *Melanonyx* of the black markings on the breast and belly, as well as their presence in the species of the genus *Anser* (*sensu stricto*), shew us, most decidedly, that the birds of these genera have descended from two distinct and ancient ancestral types—types as distinct from one another as the ancestral type of *Eulabeia* was from them. In fact, the black bars on head of *Eulabeia indica* ought to be regarded as of great antiquity, and it is impossible to suppose for a moment that they have been acquired in comparatively recent times. For this reason these bars are proof, for me at least, of absolute generic rank, and are of the same importance as is the presence or the absence of the black markings on the under parts of *Anser* and *Melanonyx*. Why this is so I hope soon to be able to shew in a work that I am now writing, in which I shall treat of the differences between generic and specific characters. These differences are now often confounded by systematic zoologists, though I deny any specific importance to, let us say, the presence or absence of a white collar in the Pheasants &c.

We know that in the Catalogue of the Chenomorphæ Count Salvadori does not accord generic rank even to the genus *Eulabeia*, but that he does so to *Chen* and *Philacte*. The author, however, in giving the characteristics of *Chen*, omits the only one of absolute generic importance, as I consider it, viz. the black bands along the tomia, by which *Chen* is most decidedly to be separated from all the other genera of the subfamily *Anserinæ*. This character does not admit the keeping in this genus of *Chen rossi*, which must be regarded as the type of *Exanthemops*.

At all events, if *Eulabeia* is not to be separated from *Anser*, there is no plausible reason for maintaining *Chen* or *Philacte* ! But such a classification would almost bring us back to

a state of things when it was thought possible to call the Grey-lag *Anas anser*!

Of still greater interest to me are Count Salvadori's remarks on the two Geese killed near Venice and sent to him by Count Arrigoni degli Oddi, as they tend to shew that these specimens make the author doubt the specific distinction of *Melanonyx arvensis* and *M. segetum*. Thus we learn that these specimens have the bills intermediate in sculpture between those of the two species *as described and figured in my book*. The bills are, respectively, 63 and 57 mm. in length, and their nails are contained in total length of *culmina* "only four times." Further, says the Count: "These have the yellow part of the bill more extended on the sides towards the base, and have a narrow line of white feathers round the base of the bill."

All these characters taken together clearly shew that the Venetian birds are genuine young, of the first year, of *M. arvensis*:—

(1) Because in no single instance have I come across a white line of feathering round the base of the bill in the young (or old) *M. segetum*, though I have done so on several occasions in the young of the first year of *M. arvensis*; (2) because this character in the birds from Venice coincides with the extension towards the base of the bill of the yellow colour; (3) because in the young of *M. arvensis* (first year) the nail *normally* occupies *but one-fourth* part of the total length of the culmen, as stated on page 112 (third line from the bottom) of my book, which fact is *never* observed at any age in *M. segetum*; and (4) because I have handled a considerable number of freshly killed (as also skins) of young *M. arvensis* that agreed well with the details given by Count Salvadori of the birds from Venice. That freshly killed birds have been obtained by myself and friends out of gaggles of typical *M. arvensis*, and in a locality in Finland where, during a period of six years' shooting, we never saw a gaggle, nor even a single individual of *M. segetum*, is a positive fact, and that I have eagerly looked out for *M. segetum*, but have never yet obtained one in the flesh, is another fact. It is true

that the young *M. arvensis* had in some cases only a very narrow line of white feathers round the base of the bill, but I suppose that this was greatly due to the early season when our shooting used to take place (the end of September and beginning of October, old style), and that the same birds, two or three months later, would have this white line round the base of the bill more developed. Since my book was printed, I have had the opportunity of examining more specimens of young *M. arvensis*, some of which had, while some had not, this white feathering round the base of the bill.

That *M. sibiricus* may, after all, not be a race of *M. arvensis*, but a distinct species, I am ready to allow, although I do not see any serious reason for taking this view, and I have nothing to say against restoring to it the name *middendorffi* (although Severtzov has described his *middendorffi* after a typical *M. arvensis*, as proved by his collection), but I decidedly deny the possibility of *M. sibiricus* (= *middendorffi*) being a geographical variety of *M. segetum*! The entire form of the bill, all its proportions, the slenderness of the *maxille*, and even the number of teeth do not for one moment allow of such a possibility. If such a fact could be admitted, all that Naumann and I have written on the bills of *M. segetum* and *M. arvensis* would be completely upset, and there would not remain a single character by which *M. sibiricus* could be distinguished from *M. segetum serrirostris*, though the birds are quite distinct species, as anyone having a series of both of them before him for comparison would easily see, if he only would take the trouble to pay attention to what I have said in my book about them.

At first I found it no easy matter to ascertain these differences in the bills of the *Melanonyches*, but I can now tell almost exactly the number of teeth of any given specimen of Goose of this group after a very superficial examination of the bill, and I think that this fact does, after all, *prove something*, and that it cannot be explained by sheer guesswork. But I fully realise that for a naturalist who has not skins of the different *Melanonyches* before him for comparison it would be almost hopeless to decide the matter, and that no

amount of reading of even the most minute descriptions would be of much help to him. If this were not so, the Geese would not have been such a puzzling group of birds for naturalists, and then, probably, I should never have undertaken the task of studying them.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

S. Petersburg,
November 1905.

S. ALPHÉRAKY.

Our foreign member, Professor Giacinto Martorelli, writes to Mr. Howard Saunders as follows:—

DEAR SIR,—I send you to-day the last-issued parts of my book ‘Gli Uccelli d’ Italia’ (11, 12, 13), and at the same time I have the pleasure of announcing that our Museum now possesses a very fine specimen of the young of *Rhodostethia rosea* (perfectly typical) killed in the beginning of January last in the Sardinian Sea.

The bird was not alone but had a companion, which was not killed, though observed again on the succeeding day.

The specimen was sent to me in the flesh, and has been mounted with exact modelling, after my own method and under my supervision.

I have preserved the body in spirit for anatomical purposes. The stomach contained some remains of small fishes and marine invertebrates.

I send you this notice of a rare little Gull that you may judge whether it is worth recording in ‘The Ibis.’

Most faithfully yours,

Museo Civico di
Storia Naturale, Milano.
March 1906.

Prof. GIACINTO MARTORELLI.

The Cruise of the ‘Valhalla,’ R.Y.S.—The following letter from Mr. M. J. Nicoll, dated “Off Tristan d’Acunha, Jan. 20th, 1906,” and addressed to Selater, was posted on the arrival of the ‘Valhalla’ at Cape Town:—

“We are lying off Tristan d’Acunha on account of the very strong wind, and have been doing so for the last three

days. I think I wrote to you last from Las Palmas*. From there we went to St. Paul's Rocks, but were unable to land on account of the weather. We then proceeded to Bahia, where we were delayed for a fortnight. At Bahia some of us went to the Island of Haparica and camped out there twice for two nights. On both occasions I collected, and got about 150 birds, doubtless all of well-known species.

"We were terribly annoyed there by grass-ticks and mosquitoes, and since we left all of us who camped out, with the exception of myself, have had bad attacks of malaria. All the same it was a most delightful experience. A night spent in a Brazilian forest is a thing to be remembered. The different Nightjars and Owls were calling all night, and the cries of the awakening birds at dawn were delightful.

"From Bahia we sailed to South Trinidad Island, where we had excellent luck. The sea was smooth, and we landed on two days without any difficulty at all. I made a good collection, including several Sea-birds not known from there before and a large series of Petrels. Of the Petrels I met with only two species—*Æstrelata wilsoni* (both light and dark phases) and *Æ. trinitatis* (which is not nearly so common as the former). I entirely failed to find the so-called *Æ. armingiana*, although I looked most carefully for it. We had a very hard climb, but got to the top of the island, on which we found two sorts of trees, a low bush, several plants, and plenty of tree-ferns. There is no land-bird on the island, although there are several species of moths and bees, and we saw some mice. I was much surprised at the small size of the land-crabs; I had always heard that they were very large and ferocious, but we found them small and very timid. I took some good photographs of birds and views of the island. Nearly the whole of the island is covered with grass except at the top where the tree-ferns grow, but the ground is rotten, and it is very difficult to walk about on it.

"From Trinidad we sailed here. The first evening I had no time to go ashore, but several of the men from the island came on board, and I gathered from them that the Thrush

* See letter above, p. 214.

(*Nesocichla eremita*) is the only land-bird found here now. None of them knew anything of the Rail of this island, though they had heard of its existence on Inaccessible Island. So I suspect that it has been extinct here for a long time. They tell me that a plague of rats, which came from a ship wrecked here, destroyed all the birds except the Thrush, which, although found here and very tame, is decidedly scarce. I went off in a boat to get some sea-birds for half an hour before dark, and obtained examples of *Thalassogeron chlororhynchus*, *Sterna vittata*, and a species of *Pelecanoides*.

“We are now waiting for the wind to drop, so that we can land. I have seen a few Birds flying round the ship, the most noticeable being *Puffinus gravis* in pairs. I shall post this letter at Cape Town.”

A postscript states that after waiting three days in vain for the gale to cease, the ‘Valhalla’ was compelled to proceed to Cape Town, where she arrived on Jan. 28th.

Another letter from Mr. Nicoll, dated Cape Town, Feb. 6th, informs us that the explorers were leaving on the following day for Europa Island in the Mozambique Channel, which, as he was assured, had never been visited by a Naturalist.

Mr. Ridgway's Visit to Costa Rica.—With very great pleasure we learn that our much-esteemed friend and Honorary Member, Mr. Ridgway, has spent a winter in Costa Rica, and has thus enjoyed a delightful interlude in the laborious process of compiling his great work on the ‘Birds of North and Middle America.’ In the last number of ‘The Condor’ (vol. vii. no. 6), Mr. Ridgway has written a most interesting article on this charming excursion, which no Ornithologist should omit to read. Having accepted a cordial invitation from the well-known Naturalist Don José C. Zeledon, of San José, he started for Costa Rica, accompanied by Mrs. Ridgway, on November the 28th, 1904, and remained there until May the 28th of the following year, thus passing a period of nearly six months in a most splendid country. For particulars of some of his principal experiences in this attractive part of Central America we must ask our readers

to refer to the traveller's 'Winter with the Birds in Costa Rica.' Suffice it to say that he traversed the country from ocean to ocean, and from the sea-level to the summit of Irazu (11,500 feet alt.), while he gives a most favourable account of it. Many rare birds, such as *Pteroglossus frantzii*, *Arinia boucardi*, *Microchera parvirostris*, *Carpodectes antoniae*, and *Cephalopterus glabricollis*, were observed in their native wilds, and of most of them fine series were obtained. A nest of the wonderful Trogon *Pharomacrus mocinno* was found, and a fully fledged young bird was taken alive!

The Structure of the Ratitæ.—A very nicely prepared table-case, the work of Mr. W. P. Pyecraft, F.Z.S., has been lately added to the Bird-Gallery of the Natural History Museum. It is designed to point out the most salient characters of the Order "Ratitæ" which distinguish them from the rest of the Class "Aves." The skull, the sternum, the shoulder-girdle, the pelvis, the sacrum, the feathers, and the wings of the various forms are illustrated by a series of carefully mounted specimens, which serve to shew their differences from all other birds and their distinctions *inter se*.

The inclusion of the Tinamous in the Ratite group will doubtless give rise to some criticism, but the structure of the palate and other characters seem to give much support to this position.

But besides its systematic purpose, this case may be regarded as forming a very valuable lesson in degeneration and in the evolution of flightless birds. Nowhere else, so far as we know, is there to be found a similar collection of preparations of the wings and sterna of the Ratitæ. Similarly prepared cases for the other Orders of Birds would be very useful, and we are sure that they would be much appreciated.

The Wild Swan of Seistan.—In the 'Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society' (vol. xvi. no. 4, 1905) will be found "A List of the Birds shot or seen in Seistan by

Members of the Seistan Arbitration Mission, 1903-05," prepared by Mr. J. W. Nicol Cuming. Amongst these is included the Whooper (*Cygnus musicus*), which is stated to be a "permanent resident" in Seistan on the Hamun, and to be "fairly numerous," many of the young being captured there. In answer to enquiries on this subject, Col. Sir Henry McMahon, the Commander of the Seistan Mission, has favoured us with the following information :—

"The specimen of the Whooper Swan (obtained on the 14th of January, 1905) was sent to the Indian Museum. We observed a great many Swans, all, so far as I could see, of this species, on the Seistan Hamun. I also saw several young birds, which had been bred on the Hamun. The Sayāds, a curious tribe of aborigines who make their livelihood by snaring ducks and fishes, pay their annual tribute to the Persian Government in the form of a fixed quantity of duck-feathers. This tribute used to include swan-feathers also, but of late the number of Swans in Seistan is said to have decreased. A number of young Swans are caught every year and sent by the Persian and Afghan Governors to Teheran, Herat, and Kandahar.

"The Hamun, with its vast expanse of open water (I have seen it in the flood-season over 100 miles long and from 5 to 15 miles wide), and with its wide expanse of thick and high reed-beds along the margin, with sheltered pools among the reeds, teems with all kinds of water-fowl during the winter, and many of them remain to breed there. The rest leave for the north in March and April, and return in September, October, and November."

There can be no doubt, we think, after what Sir Henry McMahon tells us, that a species of Wild Swan breeds habitually on the waters of Seistan. But it would seem unlikely to be the Whooper, which has been hitherto known to nest only in high northern latitudes, and has seldom been detected so far south as Seistan, even in winter. We would ask the authorities of the Indian Museum, who have received the specimen above spoken of, whether they are sure of its identification as *Cygnus musicus*, and we shall be

glad if any of our Indian correspondents can supply us with further information on this interesting point.

The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England.—The attention of our readers should be once more drawn to the lists of Birds included in the volumes of this work now in course of publication. Since the issue of vol. i., in which Mr. Meade-Waldo wrote on the Birds of Hampshire, several other histories have been completed, while we have just received a copy of the article on the ornithology of Derbyshire by the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain. This county has an especial claim to our notice from the fact that the northern and southern forms there overlap in many cases, and it is also interesting as possessing great diversity of character. The author gives us a list of the literature referring to the birds and a good account of their present position under Protection. In some cases the habits of the birds are given in rather greater detail than seems necessary for a county list, but this may well be overlooked in consideration of the equally full and valuable details which are given elsewhere. We are not astonished to learn that the Raven, Buzzard, and Kite have disappeared from the county, but agree with Mr. Jourdain that the decrease of the Wood-Lark and Pied Flycatcher is somewhat unaccountable. Many birds have increased in numbers, notably the Hawfinch, Great Crested Grebe, and Redshank. We may also draw attention to the case of a Redstart breeding in a Scotch fir-tree, and of the Chaffinch decorating its nest with scraps of paper, the latter of which reminds the present writer of a similar nest found in the county of Durham on the ground among flowering grass-stems.

The Curatorship of the Sarawak Museum.—We understand that Mr. J. Hewitt, of Jesus College, Oxford, has been appointed Curator of Rajah Brooke's Museum at Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo, in succession to Mr. Robert Shelford, who has come back to England and is now engaged on Entomological work at the University Museum, Oxford.

Corrections to Mr. Buturlin's article on the Rosy Gull.—
Mr. Buturlin requests us to make the following corrections in his article on the Rosy Gull in our last number:—

P. 135.—The Tern here referred to is the Arctic Tern,
Sterna macrura Naum.

P. 139.—The Skua here mentioned is not Buffon's Skua,
but the Pomatorhine Skua, *Lestris pomatorhinus*
(Temm.).

The New Ruwenzori Expedition.—In our last number (above p. 222) we gave some information respecting the new expedition for the further exploration of Ruwenzori, under the leadership of Mr. R. B. Woosnam, which left England in September last. We have now the pleasure of announcing that the party reached that famous mountain (*via* Mombasa, Entebbe, and Fort Portal) without incident, and at the end of December were safely encamped in the Mupuku Valley near a small hamlet called Bihunga, at an elevation of from 6000 to 7000 feet above the sea-level.

Mr. Woosnam, writing to Mr. Ogilvie-Grant, says:—

“I have not been into the forest yet, but it looks impenetrable. Below us are the undulating lower hills, appearing from a distance as if they were covered with nice short grass. But in reality they are jungles of Elephant-grass fifteen feet high, mixed with reeds and creepers.”

Mr. Woosnam does not give a good account of the weather on Ruwenzori. “We left Fort Portal and came up here in pouring rain, and it has rained every day except one for the last eight days. Everything is a sea of mud and water.”

In another letter (dated January 15th) Mr. Woosnam writes:—

“We are getting on better now, having put up a good workshop. We have already preserved about 400 birds and 82 mammals, besides a good many insects. The weather has cleared up, and we get a fair quantity of sunshine.”